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F A B L E S 62



THE
GOOD
PRINCE



Aug 07
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mature readers
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KNIGHTHOOD

Chapter Three of The Good Prince

In which an epiphany occurs, an ultimatum is delivered, and a long journey is undertaken.

"IT WAS A GOLDEN AGE,
WHEN KNIGHTHOOD
REACHED ITS ZENITH
OF HONOR AND GLORY."

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"CAMELOT AND ITS FABLED KING
SET THE STANDARD OF *TRUE*
CHIVALRY FOR ALL OF CHRISTENDOM
AND ITS LEGEND TOUCHED MUCH
OF THE PAGAN WORLDS BEYOND."

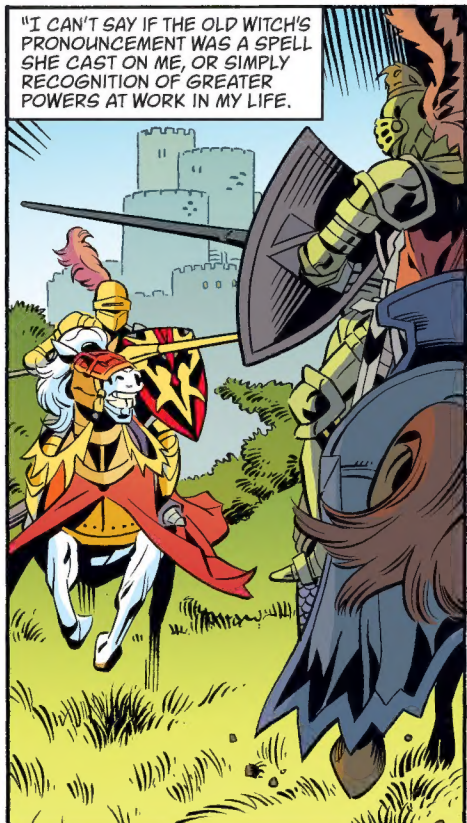


"MIGHT IN THE SERVICE OF RIGHT."



"AND I WAS ITS MOST GIFTED CHAMPION."

YOU'LL BE UNBEATABLE IN BATTLE, LANCELOT OF THE LAKE, BUT ONLY FOR SO LONG AS YOU REMAIN PURE AND HONORABLE.

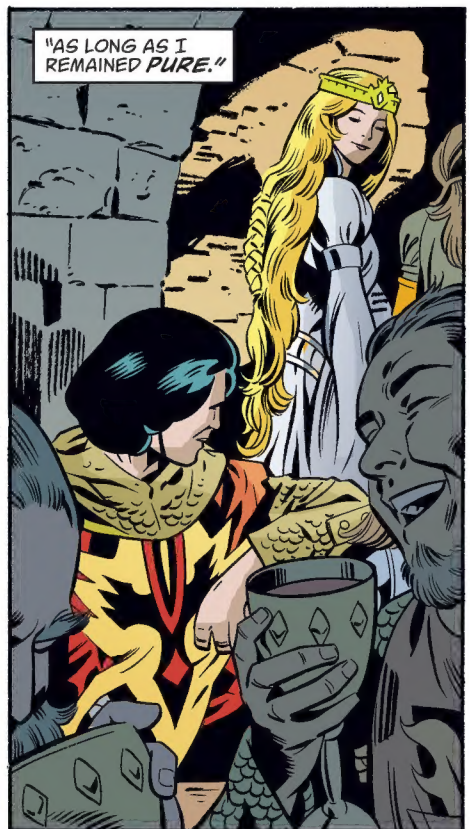
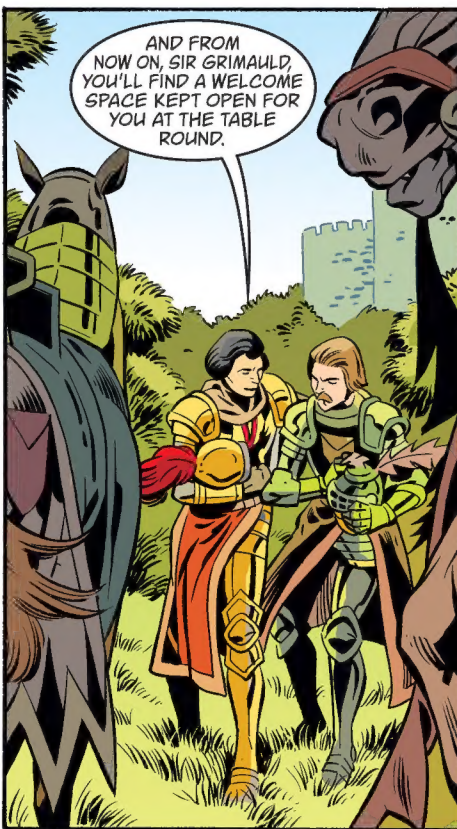
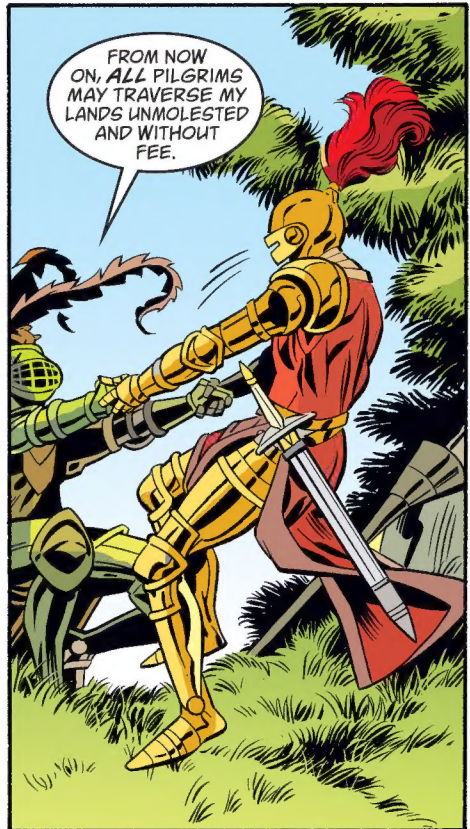



"I CAN'T SAY IF THE OLD WITCH'S PRONOUNCEMENT WAS A SPELL SHE CAST ON ME, OR SIMPLY RECOGNITION OF GREATER POWERS AT WORK IN MY LIFE."



"BUT I WAS UNBEATABLE."







"YOU KNOW THE REST OF THAT STORY. EVERYONE DOES. I DIDN'T LOSE MY HONOR, I THREW IT AWAY."

WE CAN'T CONTINUE THIS, LANCE.



I KNOW, GWEN. I'VE DISCOVERED MY ETERNAL DAMNATION IN YOUR ARMS AND IN YOUR BED, BUT I CAN'T RESIST IT.

I CAN'T STAY AWAY FROM YOU.



"THERE WERE MANY WHISPERS AND RUMORS BY THEN, BUT MOST REFUSED TO BELIEVE I'D EVER FORSWEAR MYSELF--UP UNTIL THE DAY I WAS DEFEATED IN THE LISTS."

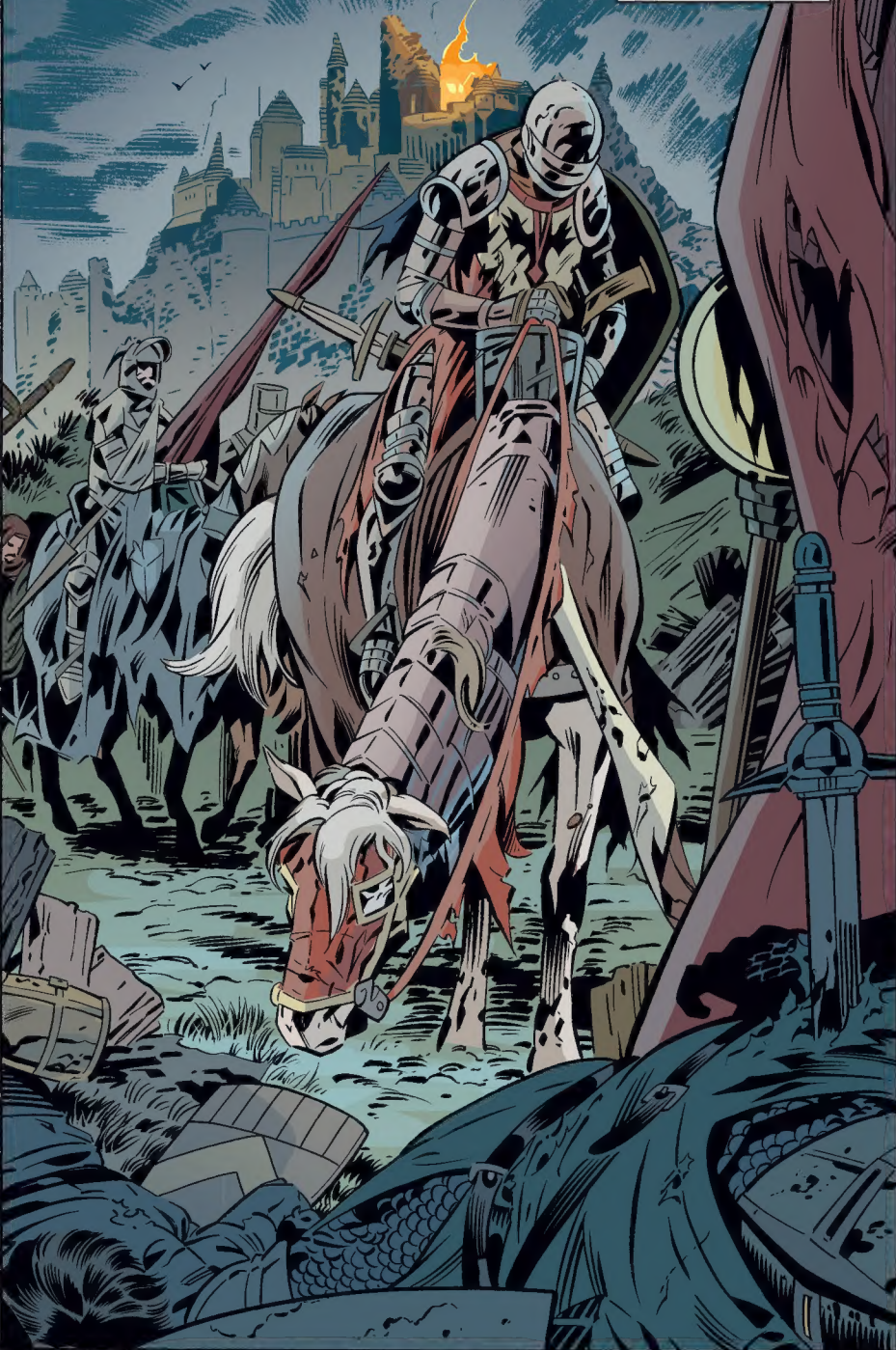
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

GWAIN ACTUALLY HORSED LANCE!

"ACCUSATIONS FOLLOWED, LEADING TO TRIALS, WHICH BECAME OPEN REVOLT AND THEN, INEVITABLY, WAR.

"MY INITIAL BETRAYAL, AND THE UNFORGIVABLE ACTS I PERPETRATED AFTERWARDS, SPLIT THE ROUND TABLE AND LED TO THE **DOWNFALL** OF CAMELOT.

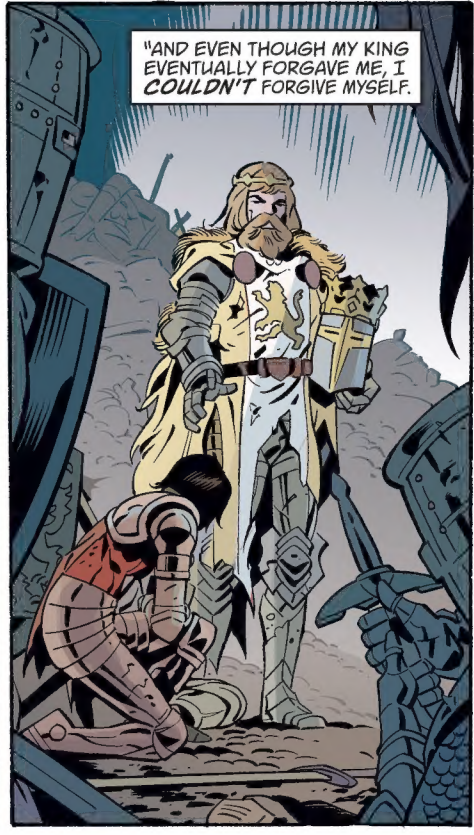
"THE 'BRIEF SHINING MOMENT' NEEDN'T HAVE BEEN SO BRIEF, BUT FOR ME."



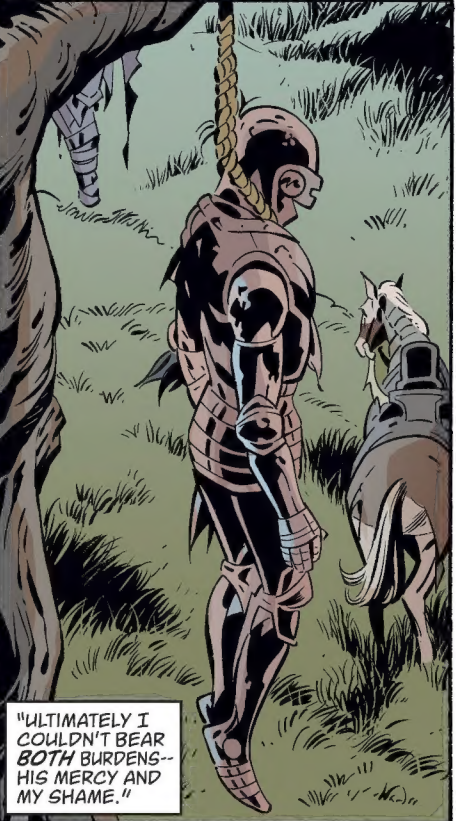
"I SURVIVED ALL OF IT. I HAD ALWAYS BEEN A WARRIOR AT HEART AND COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO SURRENDER.



"AND EVEN THOUGH MY KING EVENTUALLY FORGAVE ME, I COULDN'T FORGIVE MYSELF.



"IN FACT, IT WAS ARTHUR'S CLEMENCY THAT FINALLY BROKE MY SPIRIT.



"ULTIMATELY I COULDN'T BEAR BOTH BURDENS-- HIS MERCY AND MY SHAME."



LIKE SO MANY OTHER THINGS, AFTER MY FALL FROM GRACE, I EVEN BUNGLED MY OWN **SUICIDE**.

TAKE SOME ADVICE, PRINCE. IF YOU EVER DECIDE TO HANG YOURSELF, TAKE YOUR ARMOR **OFF** FIRST.

"I SURVIVED AN **UNGODLY** TIME IN THAT DAMNED TREE, SLOWLY DYING OF THIRST AND EXPOSURE."

IT'S **MY** ARMOR NOW, ISN'T IT?

YES. AND PERHAPS YOU CAN TAKE THE CURSE OFF IT.

OF COURSE. THAT'S WHY I BEGGED BLUE TO HELP ME. THAT SILLY PLAN WAS SO CLOSE TO WHAT I'M ACTUALLY **SUPPOSED** TO DO.

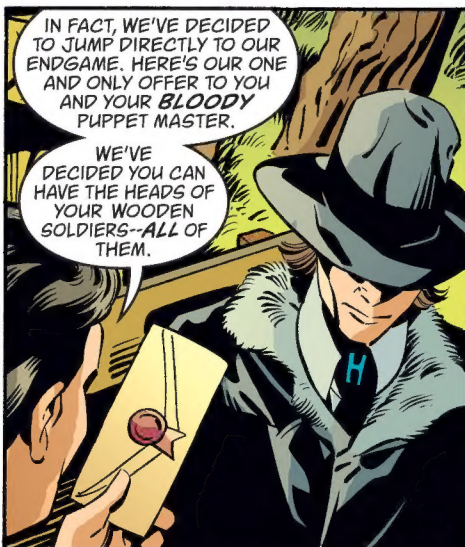
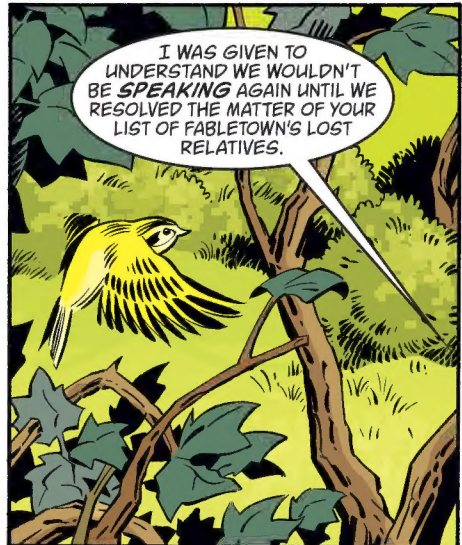
I WAS IN SUCH A FOG, BUT NOW I SEE IT ALL SO CLEARLY.

YOU'LL SERVE ME, LANCE. THAT'S PART OF IT. THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD YOUR **OWN** REDEMPTION.

THAT'S MY UNDERSTANDING AS WELL, PRINCE AMBROSE.

COME ON, WE'VE GOT SO MUCH TO DO.

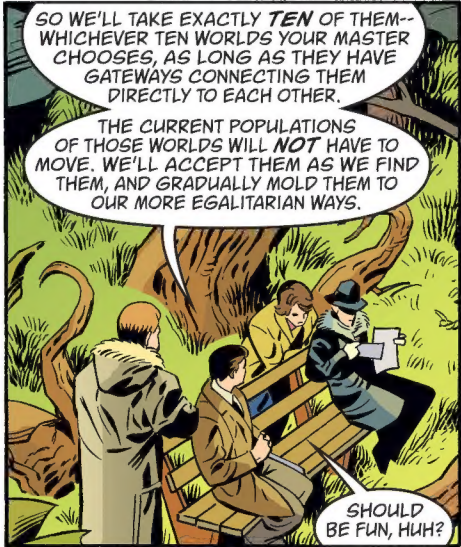






THEN, AS JUST REPARATIONS FOR YOUR PREVIOUS WAR CRIMES AGAINST US, YOU'LL TITHE ONE TENTH OF ALL IMPERIAL LANDS OVER TO FABLETOWN.

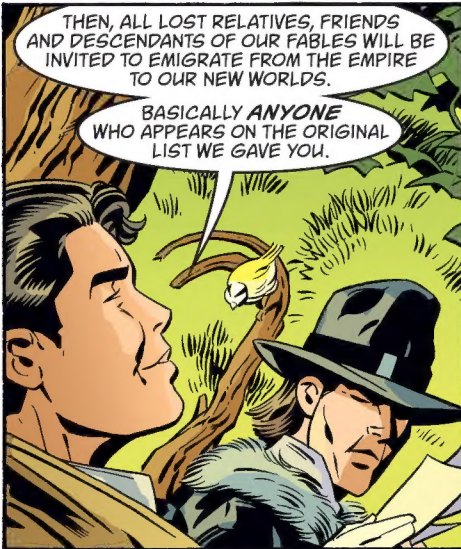
WE UNDERSTAND THE EMPIRE CURRENTLY SPANS MORE THAN A HUNDRED FABLE WORLDS.



SO WE'LL TAKE EXACTLY **TEN** OF THEM--WHICHEVER TEN WORLDS YOUR MASTER CHOOSES, AS LONG AS THEY HAVE GATEWAYS CONNECTING THEM DIRECTLY TO EACH OTHER.

THE CURRENT POPULATIONS OF THOSE WORLDS WILL **NOT** HAVE TO MOVE. WE'LL ACCEPT THEM AS WE FIND THEM, AND GRADUALLY MOLD THEM TO OUR MORE EGALITARIAN WAYS.

SHOULD BE FUN, HUH?



THEN, ALL LOST RELATIVES, FRIENDS AND DESCENDANTS OF OUR FABLES WILL BE INVITED TO EMIGRATE FROM THE EMPIRE TO OUR NEW WORLDS.

BASICALLY **ANYONE** WHO APPEARS ON THE ORIGINAL LIST WE GAVE YOU.



FINALLY, AND ONLY AFTER ALL OF THE PREVIOUS CONDITIONS HAVE BEEN MET, GEPPETTO WILL BE ALLOWED **AND REQUIRED** TO SIGN THE FABLETOWN COMPACT.

OFFICIALLY PARDONING ALL OF HIS PAST MISDEEDS.



THIS--!
THIS IS **OUT-RAGEOUS!**

IT SURE IS. IT'S ALSO NON-NEGOTIABLE. AND THE DEAL'S ONLY GOOD FOR NINETY DAYS.





THAT SHOULD GIVE YOU ENOUGH TIME TO SCURRY HOME AND GET YOUR MASTER'S REPLY.

NOW, WITH THAT CONCLUDED, I INVITE YOU TO GET OUT OF MY SIGHT, HANSEL.



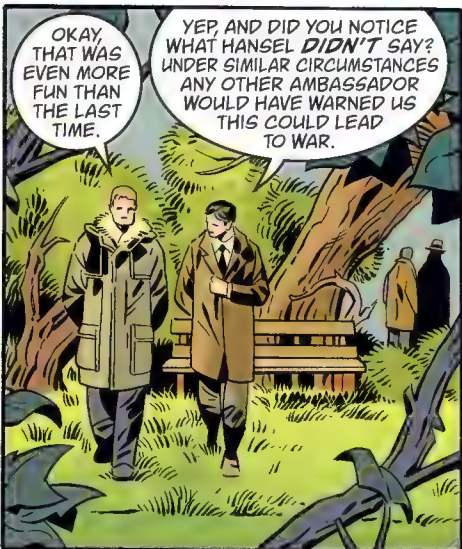
SHOW YOUR UGLY MUG IN THIS WORLD AGAIN, WITHOUT YOUR PUPPETEER'S ANSWER, AND I'LL HAVE YOU STRUNG UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET.

THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE TRAVESTY! YOU, SIR, ARE NO DIPLOMAT!



ARE YOU HAVING SO MUCH TROUBLE KEEPING UP, BOY? THIS ISN'T DIPLOMACY. IT'S AN ULTIMATUM. NOW, SLITHER ALONG ON YOUR WAY. WE'RE DONE. FINISHED.

WE REQUIRE NOTHING MORE OF YOU.



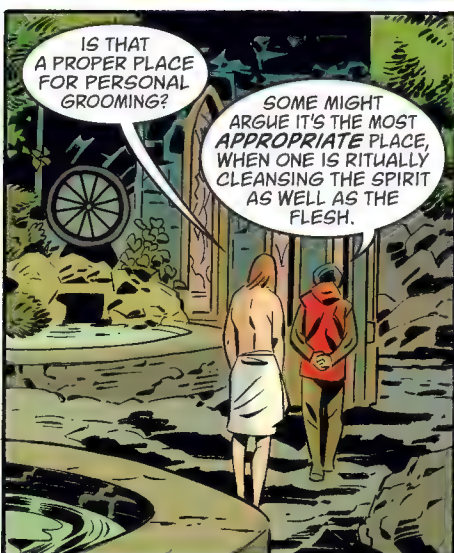
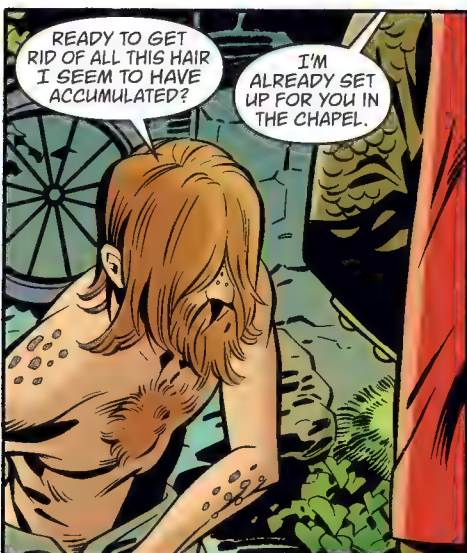
OKAY, THAT WAS EVEN MORE FUN THAN THE LAST TIME.

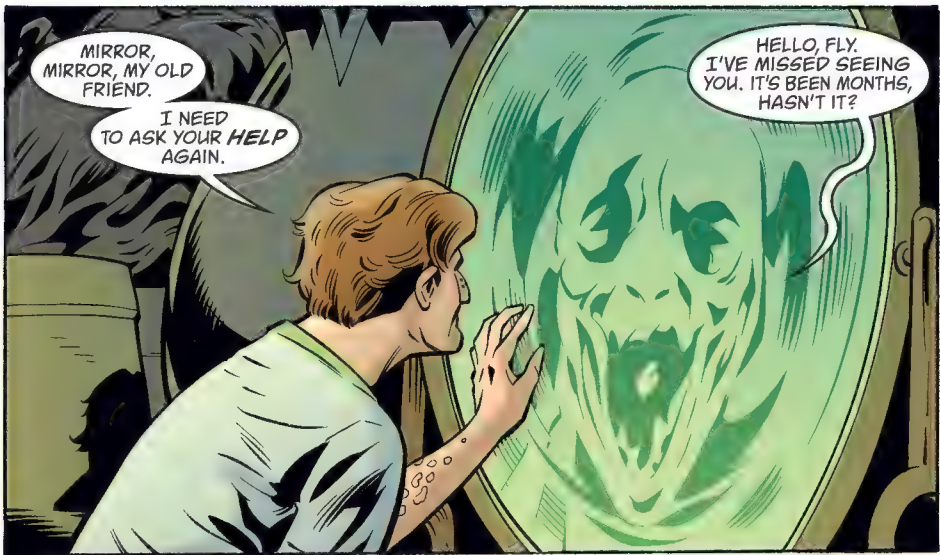
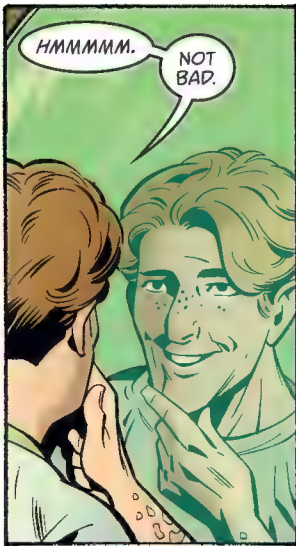
YES, AND DID YOU NOTICE WHAT HANSEL DIDN'T SAY? UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES ANY OTHER AMBASSADOR WOULD HAVE WARNED US THIS COULD LEAD TO WAR.

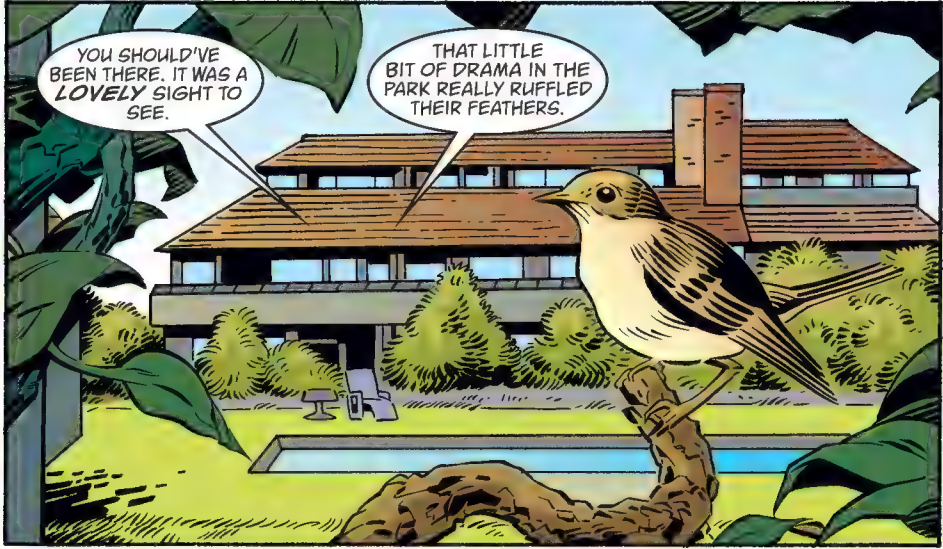


IN FACT, THE ONLY REASON I COULD IMAGINE HIS NOT SAYING SOMETHING LIKE THAT IS IF THERE ALREADY ARE WAR PLANS UNDER WAY. PLANS HE'S CONSTRAINED TO KEEP SECRET.

WHICH CONFIRMS TOTENKINDER'S INTEL IN FULL. WE'RE AT WAR WITH THE EMPIRE.

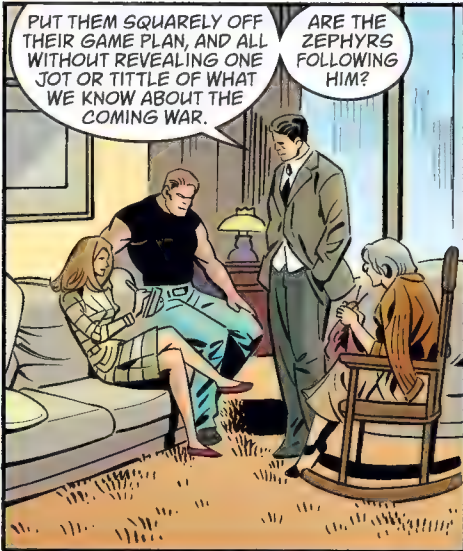






YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN THERE. IT WAS A LOVELY SIGHT TO SEE.

THAT LITTLE BIT OF DRAMA IN THE PARK REALLY RUFFLED THEIR FEATHERS.



PUT THEM SQUARELY OFF THEIR GAME PLAN, AND ALL WITHOUT REVEALING ONE JOT OR TITTLE OF WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE COMING WAR.

ARE THE ZEPHYRS FOLLOWING HIM?



YES, AND NOW THAT MY GROUP ON THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR IS DIRECTLY PIGGYBACKING THEIR VISION ON THAT OF THE ZEPHYRS, WE'RE GATHERING OUR INFORMATION IN REAL TIME.

THAT WAS QUITE A GOOD IDEA OF YOURS, PRINCE CHARMING.



WHAT CAN I SAY? BATTLE TACTICS AND INTRIGUES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MY FORTE.

I THOUGHT YOUR SOLE EXPERTISE WAS THE TACTICS OF AMOROUS PURSUIT.

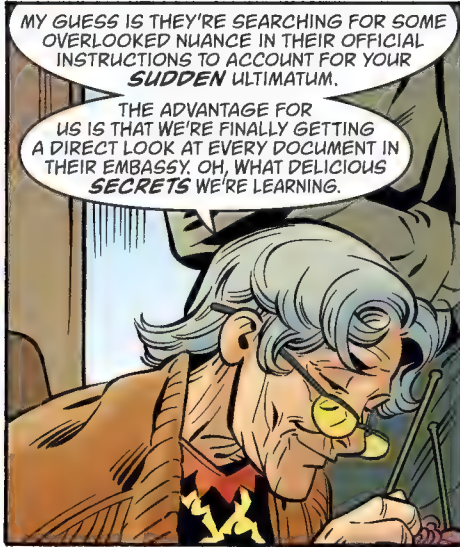
SAME THING, BEAUTY. SAME THING.



SO WHAT ARE THEY DOING NOW?

THEY WENT DIRECTLY BACK TO THEIR EMBASSY AND ARE FEVERISHLY TEARING THROUGH EVERY BOOK AND DOCUMENT.





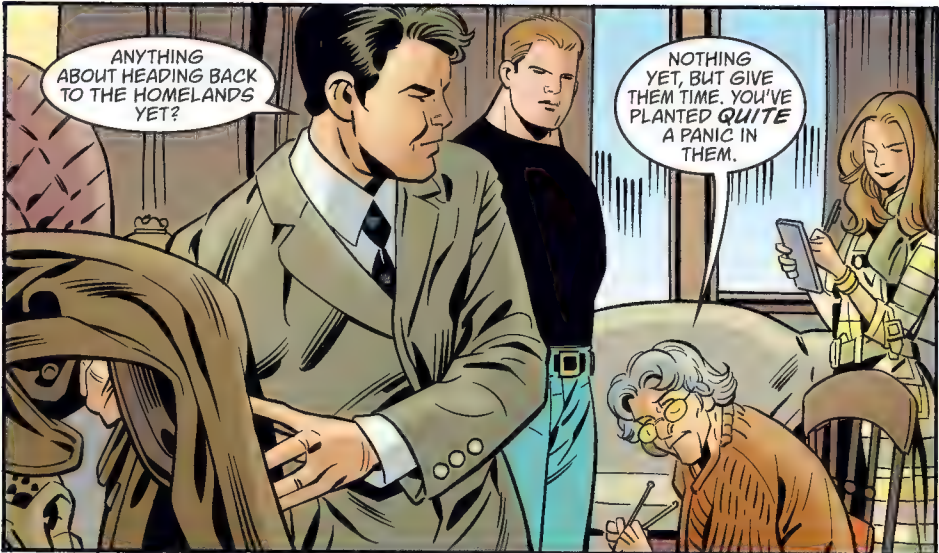
MY GUESS IS THEY'RE SEARCHING FOR SOME OVERLOOKED NUANCE IN THEIR OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO ACCOUNT FOR YOUR **SUDDEN** ULTIMATUM.

THE ADVANTAGE FOR US IS THAT WE'RE FINALLY GETTING A DIRECT LOOK AT EVERY DOCUMENT IN THEIR EMBASSY. OH, WHAT DELICIOUS **SECRETS** WE'RE LEARNING.



HOW FAST CAN WE WRITE THIS INFORMATION DOWN?

DON'T WORRY, SHERIFF. MY GROUP WON'T FORGET ANYTHING THEY OVERSEE. WE'VE GOT MANY INGENUOUS **SPELLS** IN PROGRESS.



ANYTHING ABOUT HEADING BACK TO THE HOMELANDS YET?

NOTHING YET, BUT GIVE THEM TIME. YOU'VE PLANTED **QUITE** A PANIC IN THEM.



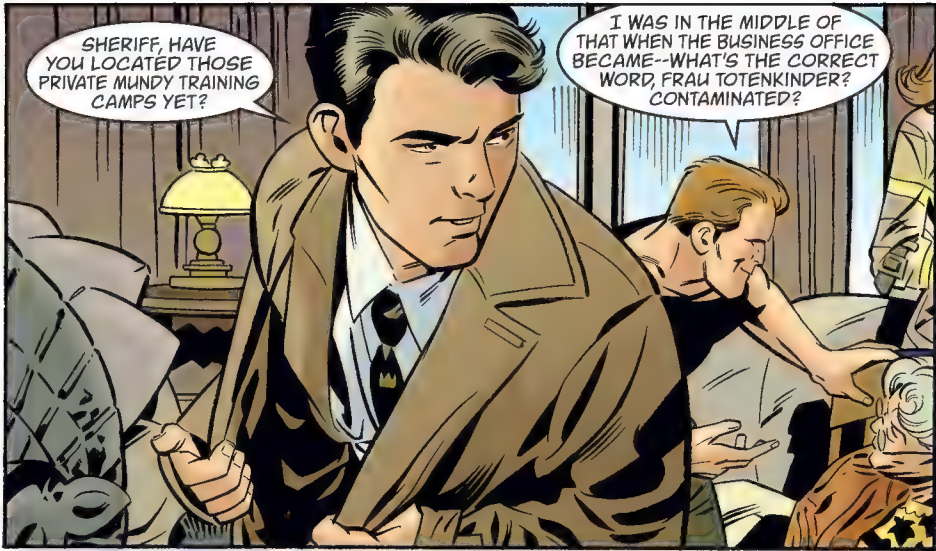
THEY'LL NEED A DAY OR TWO TO SETTLE DOWN AND REALIZE THEY CAN'T AVOID TAKING THIS MATTER BACK HOME.

THE MOST **VITAL** PART OF THIS SCHEME IS TO FOLLOW THEM TO WHATEVER SECRET GATE THEY'VE BEEN USING.



WE NEED TO KNOW IF WE CAN CUT THEM OFF FROM THIS WORLD. IF NOT, WE'RE **COOKED**.

KEEP ME INFORMED OF **ALL** DEVELOPMENTS. I'M ON MY WAY UP TO THE FARM TO HAVE THAT CHAT WITH SNOW AND HER **PET** WOLF.



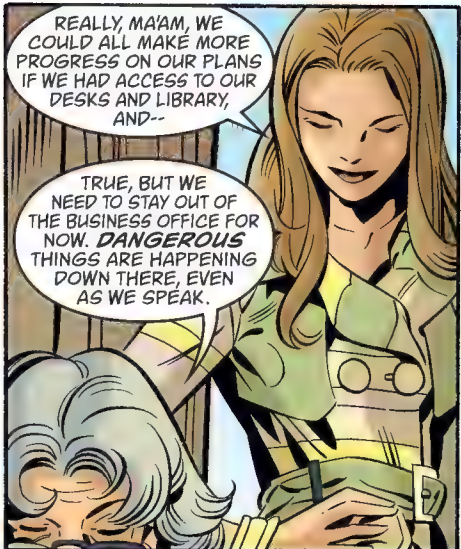
SHERIFF, HAVE YOU LOCATED THOSE PRIVATE MUNDY TRAINING CAMPS YET?

I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT WHEN THE BUSINESS OFFICE BECAME--WHAT'S THE CORRECT WORD, FRAU TOTENKINDER? CONTAMINATED?



THAT WILL DO, I SUPPOSE.

KEEP ME POSTED. I HAVE TO SCOOT. I'M **ALREADY** RUNNING LATE.



REALLY, MA'AM, WE COULD ALL MAKE MORE PROGRESS ON OUR PLANS IF WE HAD ACCESS TO OUR DESKS AND LIBRARY, AND--

TRUE, BUT WE NEED TO STAY OUT OF THE BUSINESS OFFICE FOR NOW. **DANGEROUS** THINGS ARE HAPPENING DOWN THERE, EVEN AS WE SPEAK.



NO NEED TO BE SO CRYPTIC. YOU MEAN THE MAGIC ARMOR CLEAN-UP?

YES, EXACTLY.



THE ARMOR IS BEING CLEANED, **FINALLY**.

IT'S ALL GOING ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE.



YOU'VE GOT ME BACK IN MY OLD ORANGE JUMPSUIT AGAIN? BUT I TOLD YOU I WAS ALL DONE WITH MY LIFE AS A PERPETUAL CUSTODIAN AND PRISONER-TRUSTEE.

TRUE, PRINCE, BUT YOU NEED TO WEAR SOMETHING BETWEEN HARD ARMOR AND SOFT SKIN.

THIS GARMENT FITS YOU, IS NEWLY AS CLEAN AS YOU ARE, AND IS PERFECT FOR THIS USE.



LET'S START WITH THE BREASTPLATE.



HEY! THE ARMOR JUST BECAME...

IT'S BRIGHT AND NEW AGAIN!

AS IT SHOULD BE. YOU'VE DONE NOTHING TO PROFANE IT, AS I HAVE.



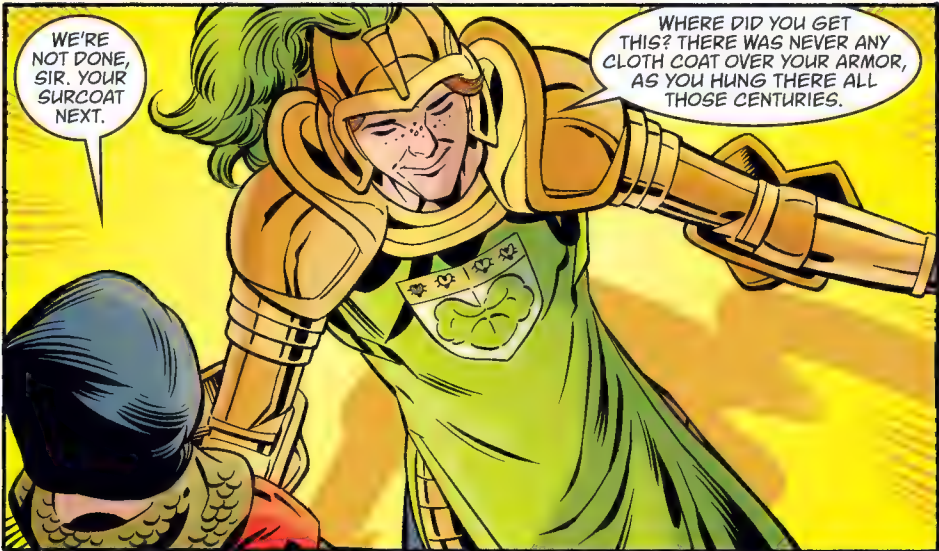
AND IT'S MOVING ALL OVER ME!

IT'S RESHAPING ITSELF TO YOUR TALL AND LANKY PROPORTIONS, PRINCE.



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OH DEAR. THIS ONE SEEMS TO HAVE GROWN MUCH BIGGER OVER THE YEARS, NO DOUBT INCREASING AS ITS LEGEND GREW.

WE CAN FIX THAT.



HERE WE GO.

BUT THAT'S THE SWORD IN THE STONE! EXCALIBUR!

I CAN'T POSSIBLY--

I'M NOT WORTHY TO--



IF YOU AREN'T MEANT TO WIELD IT, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PULL IT FROM THE STONE. WE'RE STILL AT THE PART OF YOUR MISSION WHERE I AM YOUR GUIDE, REMEMBER?

I KNOW THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED TO DO, SO...

...STEP FORWARD, PRINCE. TAKE A GOOD GRIP ON THE HANDLE--THAT'S IT. BOTH HANDS ARE FINE.



NOW PULL.

OH MY DEAR-LORD!

EASY AS PULLING A TICK FROM THE PUDDING, EH? I *KNEW* YOU WERE MEANT TO HAVE IT.



BUT, I'M NO WARRIOR. I WAS A PRINCE, YES, BUT NEVER A KNIGHT. IN THE ONLY BATTLE I EVER TRIED TO FIGHT, I WAS DEFEATED BY MY OWN CURSE BEFORE IT EVER BEGAN.

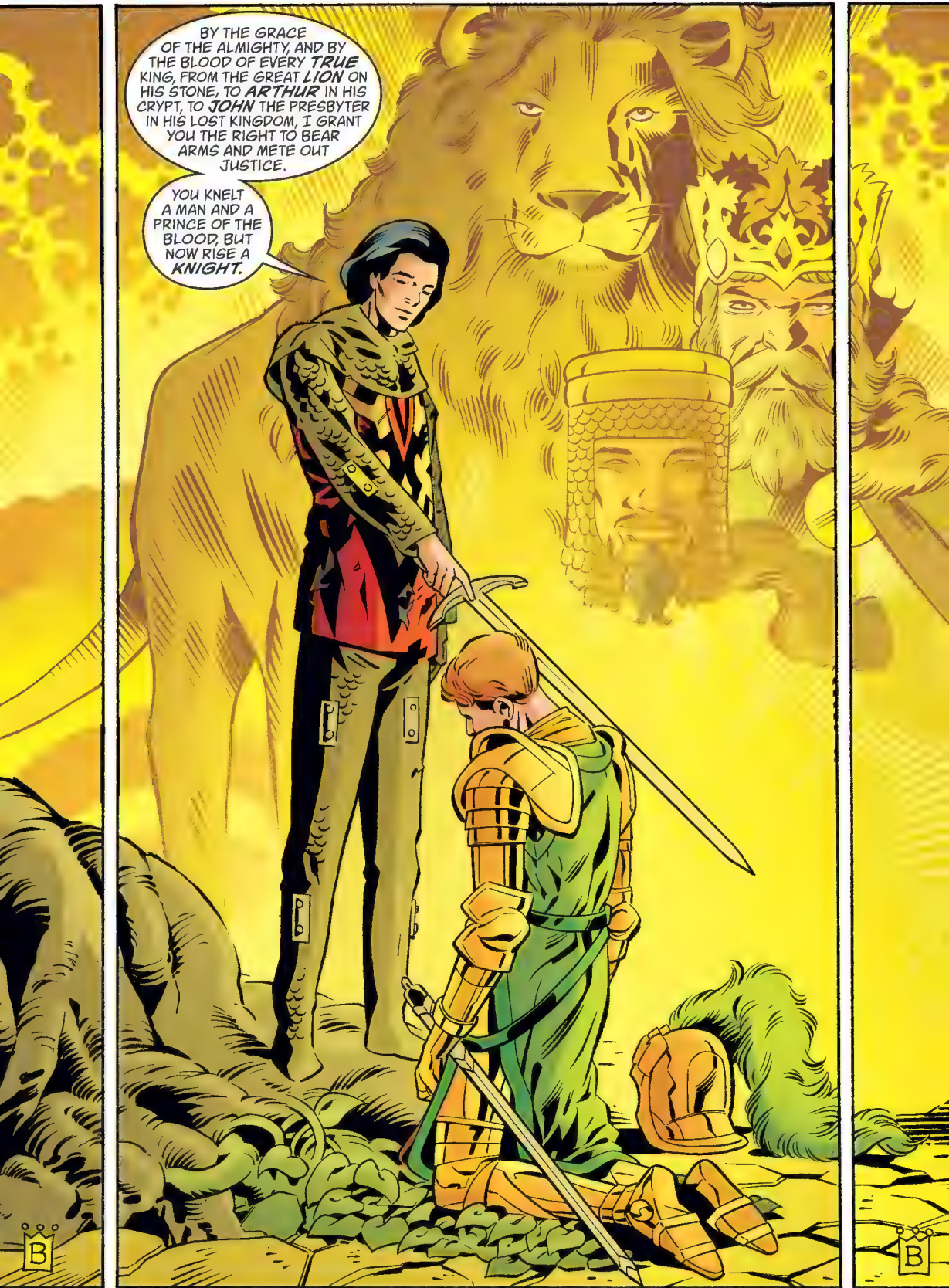
IF THAT'S SO, THEN KNEEL, PRINCE. FOR IT'S *IMPORTANT* NOW THAT ALL THINGS BE DONE ACCORDING TO THE LAW.


B

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BY THE GRACE OF THE ALMIGHTY, AND BY THE BLOOD OF EVERY **TRUE** KING, FROM THE GREAT **LION** ON HIS STONE, TO **ARTHUR** IN HIS CRYPT, TO **JOHN** THE PRESBYTER IN HIS LOST KINGDOM, I GRANT YOU THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS AND METE OUT JUSTICE.

YOU KNELT A MAN AND A PRINCE OF THE BLOOD, BUT NOW RISE A **KNIGHT**.





KEEP IN MIND THAT YOU'LL BE **UNBEATABLE** IN BATTLE, AS LONG AS YOU WEAR THIS ARMOR, WIELD EXCALIBUR, AND--MOST **IMPORTANT**-- ONLY SO LONG AS YOU KEEP PURE AND GOOD.

REMEMBER ALWAYS HOW THE CORRUPTION SET IN WHEN I BETRAYED MY KING.

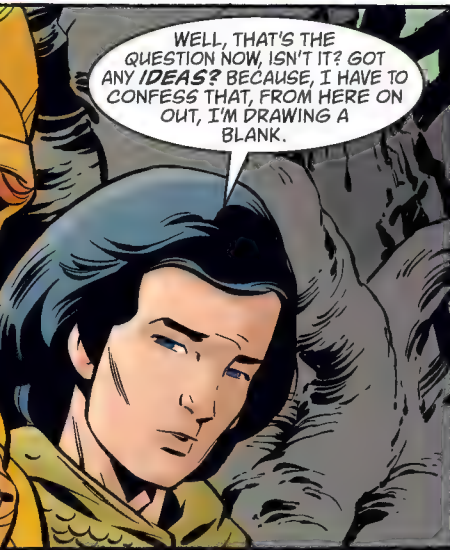


IF I DON'T, I'LL HAVE YOU ON HAND TO REMIND ME. THAT'S YOUR **FIRST** STANDING ORDER.


THE FACT THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO DRAW EXCALIBUR FROM THE STONE PROVES THAT YOU'RE DESTINED TO BE THE ONE TRUE AND RIGHTFUL KING.




KING OF WHAT LAND?



WELL, THAT'S THE QUESTION NOW, ISN'T IT? GOT ANY **IDEAS**? BECAUSE, I HAVE TO CONFESS THAT, FROM HERE ON OUT, I'M DRAWING A **BLANK**.




I KNOW IT'S MY JOB TO CONTINUE SERVING YOU, BUT I'M NO LONGER SURE HOW OR WHERE.

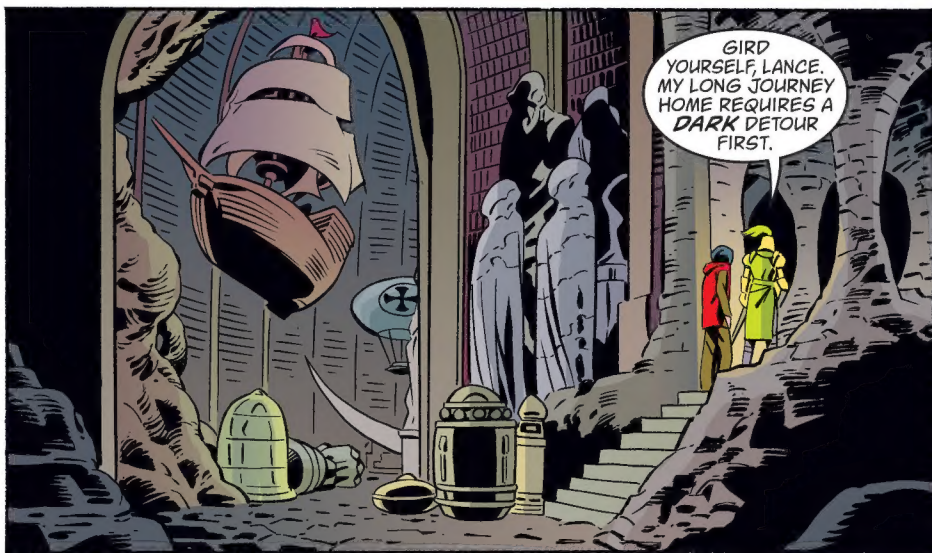


YES, LANCE, I DO HAVE AN IDEA. SINCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND VISION HAS IMPOSED NO PARTICULAR KINGDOM ON ME, THEN MY RECENT VISIONS TAKE PRECEDENCE.

I KNOW WHERE I'M **DESTINED** TO RULE.



AT LONG **LAST**, IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GO HOME.



IF YOU GET
LOST DOWN THERE, I
DON'T KNOW THAT EVEN
MY NEW POWERS CAN
FIND YOU AGAIN.



NEXT:
Down the
Witching Well



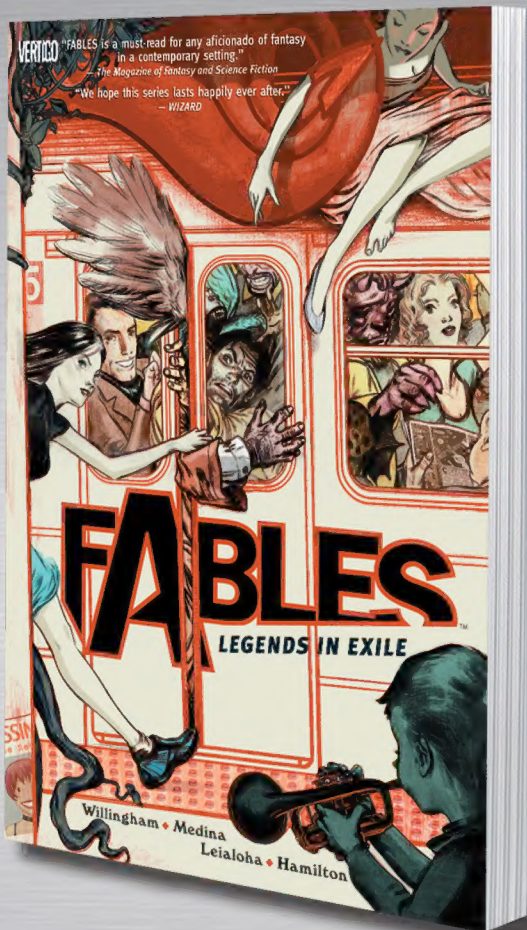
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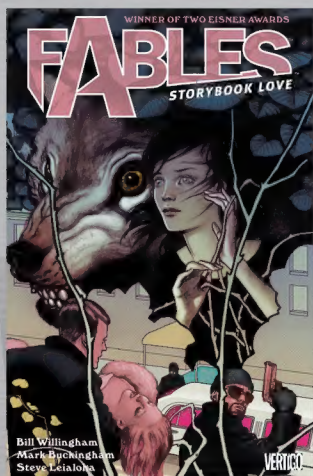
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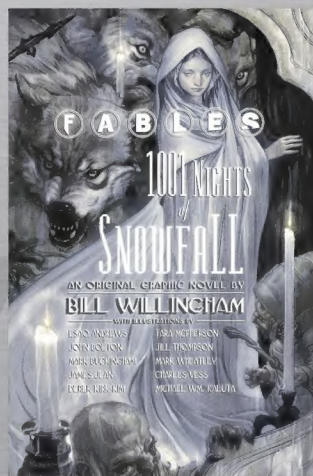
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